

Peaceniks Post 9/16/66

The House Committee on Un-American Activities is scheduled to open a new show this morning. It has subpoenaed a baker's dozen of witnesses—not one of whom, in all probability, has been heard of much beyond his own family—and will quiz them about the war in Vietnam. The subpoenaed witnesses appear to be about as deficient in patriotism as in common sense. But they are as entitled as anyone else in a free country to think and say what they please about public affairs. Judging from past HUAC performances, there is reason to fear that the hearing may be as disorderly, undignified and uninformative as most of the hearings conducted by that body; and that it may result once more in citations for contempt which, like nearly all others brought by this committee, will eventually be thrown out by the courts.

The justification today is a bill which would make it a criminal offense for any American citizen to "solicit, give or attempt to give, urge or advise another to give financial aid or assistance to the hostile power or any of its agents" when the United States is engaged in armed hostilities. The language of this proposal is so vague in its terms and so liable to be applied to any criticism of American policy in Southeast Asia as to give good ground for the apprehension expressed by the American Civil Liberties Union that the HUAC hearings will start "a new period of official suppression of dissent."

If there is need for new legislation to forbid aid to countries with which the United States is engaged in hostilities, let it be considered by the Judiciary Committee or the Foreign Affairs Committee; and let the first witnesses be responsible public authorities qualified to assess the need. The purpose of a congressional hearing should be something more than mere harassment of persons whose opinions are unpopular.